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54 Programmable read only memory.

57 Unique EPROM and EEPROM devices are provided with a composite dielectric layer between the control gate and the floating gate which is sufficiently thick to provide electrical and physical integrity but also has a high equivalent dielectric constant. The use of the composite dielectric layer alleviates certain problems experienced in the prior art EPROM and EEPROM devices which utilize a polycrystalline silicon floating gate and a polycrystalline silicon control gate separated by an SiO₂ dielectric layer, such as the problems of sharp silicon points polysilicon grain growth causing low dielectric breakdown strength. In contrast to the prior art, a composite dielectric layer serves as a partially relaxable dielectric between the control gate and the floating gate of an EEPROM or an EPROM. The composite dielectric layer provides high capacitance between the floating gate and the control gate without the insulative and breakdown problems encountered with prior art thin dielectric layers, with electron injection taking place through the gate oxide between the drain extension and the floating gate, (EEPROM), and between the channel and the floating gate (EPROM). In another embodiment of this invention, the composite dielectric layer is implemented between the drain extension (EEPROM) or the channel (EPROM) and the floating gate and serves as the tunnel oxide.

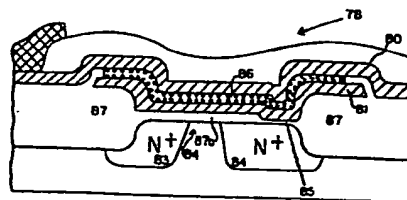


FIG. 6

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1 PROGRAMMABLE READ ONLY MEMORY

2
3
4 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5
6 Field of the Invention

7
8 This invention relates to a Programmable Read Only
9 Memory structure and more particularly to a novel
10 integrated circuit structure for the cells of such a
11 memory.

12
13
14
15 Description of the Prior Art

16
17 Integrated circuit memory devices are known in the
18 prior art. Figure 1a shows a cross-sectional view of a
19 typical Metal Oxide Silicon (MOS) Electrically Erasable
20 Programmable Read Only Memory (EEPROM) cell 19 capable of
21 storing a single binary digit ("bit"). Cell 19 includes P
22 type substrate 10, N type drain 11b, N type source 11a,
23 channel region 13, floating gate 15, control gate 16,
24 tunnel oxide 12 between floating gate 15 and drain extension
25 11c, dielectric oxide 18 located between floating gate 15
26 and control gate 16, field oxide 17, and electrical contacts
27 14a and 14b. Floating gate 15 is capacitively coupled to
28 control gate 16 through dielectric oxide 18.

29
30 To program cell 19 to store a logical "one", the
31 drain 11b is connected to a high voltage (typically
32 approximately 21 volts) through contact 14b, and source
33 11a is either connected to a small positive voltage
34 (approximately 3 volts) through contact 14a or left
35 unconnected ("floating"). Control gate 16 is connected to
36 ground. The ground voltage on control gate 16 is capaci-
37 tively coupled to floating gate 15, thereby holding floating
38

1 gate 15 near ground potential. Because of the high positive
2 voltage placed on drain 11b and drain extension 11c,
3 electrons in the floating gate 15 tunnel through the
4 tunnel oxide 12 into the drain extension 11c, thus leaving
5 a net positive charge on floating gate 15. When program-
6 ming is complete, floating gate 15 retains this positive
7 charge, thus decreasing the voltage required to be placed
8 on control gate 16 to render cell 19 conductive. Thus
9 cell 19, having a decreased control gate threshold voltage
10 (i.e. the voltage on control gate 16 required to turn cell
11 19 on), stores a logical one. The control gate threshold
12 voltage for a cell 19 which has been programmed to store a
13 logical one is typically zero or slightly negative (e.g.
14 -3 volts). A cell 19 which is not programmed by placing a
15 positive charge on floating gate 15 has a typical control
16 gate threshold voltage of 1 volt.

17
18 To erase cell 19, ground voltage is applied to drain
19 11b via contact 14b and a high positive erase voltage
20 (typically approximately 20 volts) is applied to control
21 gate 16. Electrons then flow from drain extension 11c
22 through tunnel oxide 12 to floating gate 15 thereby
23 discharging floating gate 15 to zero or to a slightly
24 negative voltage. To turn on erased cell 19, a rather
25 high positive voltage on the control gate 16 is needed and
26 the control gate threshold voltage for an "erased" cell 19
27 is, for example, approximately +5 volts.

28
29 To read cell 19, drain 11b is connected to a small
30 positive voltage (typically approximately 2 volts) and
31 source 11a is grounded. A sense amplifier (not shown)
32 detects the current flowing through drain 11b. A read
33 voltage (typically approximately 2 volts) is placed on
34 control gate 16 which is sufficiently positive to turn on
35 cell 19 when cell 19 stores a logical one (i.e. floating
36 gate 15 is charged positive), but which is not sufficiently
37 positive to turn on cell 19 when cell 19 stores a logical
38

1 zero (i.e. floating gate 15 is charged to zero or slightly
2 negative). The sense amplifier senses the drain current
3 of cell 19, which in turn indicates if cell 19 is turned
4 on or off, which is determined by the logical state (i.e.
5 logical one or zero) of the bit stored in cell 19. Thus,
6 the data stored in cell 19 is read.

7
8 An array of EEPROM cells forming an EEPROM device can
9 be made with supporting periphery circuitry which allows
10 selective programming, erasing and reading. Such an array
11 is described, for example in "A 16Kb Electrically Erasable
12 Nonvolatile Memory" by W. S. Johnson et al., 1980 IEEE
13 International Solid-State Circuits Conference, P. 152,
14 1980.

15
16 Figure 1b shows a typical prior art Erasable Program-
17 mable Read Only Memory (EPROM) cell 24, containing a
18 control gate 25, floating gate 26, N type source region
19 28a, N type drain region 28b, dielectric 27, field oxide
20 29, gate oxide 30, P type channel 32 and P type substrate
21 31. To program cell 24, high positive voltages (typically
22 approximately 20 volts) are applied to drain 28b and
23 control gate 25, and source 28a is grounded. The high
24 voltage applied to control gate 25 is capacitively coupled
25 to the floating gate 26, which causes channel 32 to conduct,
26 thus turning cell 24 on. Because of the high drain voltage,
27 a rather large quantity of "hot" electrons are generated
28 in the channel 32, such "hot" electrons having sufficiently
29 high energy to overcome the potential barrier of gate
30 oxide 30. These hot electrons are attracted to and collected
31 by the floating gate 26, which is at a positive potential
32 due to the positive voltage applied to control gate 25.
33 These hot electrons which are collected on the floating
34 gate 26 make the floating gate voltage negative and thus
35 raise the control gate threshold voltage of cell 24 by
36 several volts--and a logical "one" bit is stored in cell
37 24. To read cell 24, read voltages (typically 2 to 3
38

1 volts) are applied to drain 28b and control gate 25, and
2 source 28a is grounded. The read voltage applied to
3 control gate 25 is such that it is not sufficiently high
4 to turn on cell 24 when cell 24 stores a logical one, but
5 is sufficiently high to turn on cell 24 when cell 24
6 stores a logical zero. A sense amplifier (not shown) is
7 used in a similar fashion as previously described in
8 conjunction with the EEPROM of Figure 1a, to sense the
9 data stored in cell 24.

10

11 To erase EPROM cell 24, UV (ultra-violet) light is
12 used to illuminate the floating gate 26. The passivation
13 oxide 27 surrounding the floating gate is transparent to
14 UV light. UV light has sufficiently high photon energy to
15 impart sufficient energy to the electrons on the floating
16 gate 26 to cause the electrons to overcome the barrier of
17 oxide 30 and leak out from the floating gate 26 to channel
18 32, thereby discharging floating gate 26.

19

20 An array of EPROM cells forming an EPROM device can
21 be made with supporting periphery circuitry which allows
22 selective programming and reading. Erase is done for
23 entire array with UV light illumination. Such an array of
24 EPROM cells is described, for example, by G. Perlegos et
25 al., in "A 64K EPROM using Scaled MOS Technology", 1980
26 IEEE International Solid-State Circuits Conference, Page
27 142, 1980.

28

29 In integrated circuit capacitors and more particu-
30 larly in memory devices, a thin dielectric layer between
31 two conductive layers capacitively couples the conductive
32 layers. For example, in Erasable Programmable Read Only
33 Memory (EPROM) memory cells (Fig. 1b) or Electrically
34 Erasable Programmable Read Only Memory (EEPROM) cells
35 (Figure 1a), a floating gate (for example floating gate 15
36 of Figure 1a) is typically separated from the control gate
37 16 (Figure 1a) by a thin dielectric layer 18 of silicon

38

1 dioxide (SiO_2), or Silicon Nitride (Si_3N_4). It is essential
2 that this dielectric layer is very thin in order that the
3 capacitance between the control gate 16 and floating gate
4 15 is large compared with the capacitance between the
5 floating gate 15 and other regions (e.g., between floating
6 gate 15 and drain extension 11c), thereby causing the
7 voltage on floating gate 15 to closely follow the voltage
8 on control gate 16, thus allowing a large voltage drop
9 across the tunnel oxide 12 to induce tunneling current
10 during programming and erasing. However, the thin layer
11 of dielectric 18 must be of excellent insulative quality
12 so that the charge stored on the floating gate 15 does not
13 leak out over extended periods of time (i.e. 10 yrs at
14 125°C), thereby discharging floating gate 15. Providing a
15 dielectric layer which is both very thin and of excellent
16 insulative quality is very difficult. For instance, when
17 the dielectric layer 18 is made excessively thin (i.e. 500
18 angstroms or less) high capacitance between floating gate
19 15 and control gate 16 is achieved, but the dielectric
20 integrity and insulation properties of dielectric layer 18
21 are poor. Thus, if a defect exists in dielectric layer
22 18, control gate 16 may become electrically connected to
23 floating gate 15, thus causing an electrical failure of
24 the device. Alternatively, the poor insulative quality of
25 dielectric 18 allows undesirable charging or discharging
26 of floating gate 15 via control gate 16. In order to
27 prevent such defects in dielectric layer 18, dielectric
28 layer 18 must be formed to a minimum thickness of about
29 600-700Å when SiO_2 is used as dielectric 18. The use of
30 this rather thick oxide as dielectric 18 requires a large
31 overlap area between control gate 16 and floating gate 15
32 in order to achieve the necessary capacitance between
33 floating gate 15 and control gate 16. This large overlap
34 area causes the cell size to be rather large. Large cell
35 size, and thus large device size, is very undesirable in
36 that the product yield rate decreases drastically with an
37 increase in chip size.
38

1 Typically, control gate 16 and floating gate 15 are
2 formed of doped polycrystalline silicon (often called
3 "polysilicon" or "poly" for short) because of the well-
4 known advantages of polysilicon gate technology. At
5 least two problems exist with the use of a "sandwich"
6 formed of polysilicon floating gate 15, SiO₂ dielectric
7 18, and polysilicon control gate 16. One such problem is
8 the asperities (as shown in Figure 2) which are rough
9 points at the polysilicon/SiO₂ interfaces between control
10 gate 16 and dielectric 18, and between dielectric 18 and
11 floating gate 15. As shown in Figure 2, the presence of
12 sharp points C formed by the uneven distribution of silicon
13 atoms along interfaces A and B cause local high electric
14 fields at points C and thus dielectric breakdown problems
15 at sharp points C, even with a relatively low voltage
16 difference between control gate 16 and floating gate 15.
17 The low voltage breakdown at point C may occur at 3 to 4
18 times lower voltage compared to a layer of SiO₂ of the
19 same thickness but grown on single crystal silicon, rather
20 than on polycrystalline silicon. Another problem present
21 when using the sandwich formed by poly floating gate 15,
22 SiO₂ dielectric 18 and poly control gate 16 is caused by
23 the growth of polysilicon grains after oxide formation.
24 These grains are often large enough to punch through the
25 thin dielectric layer 18 (see Figure 3), thereby causing
26 an electrical short between control gate 16 and floating
27 gate 15 (Figure 1a). Silicon grains which do not punch
28 through the dielectric layer 18 reduce the thickness of
29 layer 18, and thus reduce the dielectric strength of
30 dielectric layer 18.

31

32 One possible way to achieve high capacitance between
33 control gate 16 and floating gate 15 is to form dielectric
34 18 from materials with dielectric constants greater than
35 the dielectric constant of SiO₂, such as tantalum oxide
36 or other oxides so that, for a given capacitance, the
37 dielectric layer 18 made from these materials does not
38

1 need to be as thin as a dielectric layer 18 formed of
2 SiO_2 . However, these materials do not have insulation
3 properties as good as silicon dioxide due to poor material
4 composition control and structural instability at high
5 temperatures. Furthermore, the formation of such other
6 oxides are not compatible with current integrated circuit
7 processes and thus such other oxides cannot be easily
8 implemented in nonvolatile integrated circuit memories.
9

10 The use of a composite layer of silicon-rich SiO_2 /
11 SiO_2 /silicon-rich SiO_2 between the floating gate and the
12 control gate of a memory device has been described by D.J.
13 Dimaria et al. in an article entitled, "High Current
14 Injection Into SiO_2 Using Si-rich SiO_2 Films and Experimental
15 Applications", The Physics of MOS Insulators, G. Lucovsky,
16 et al. Ed. 1980. The structure described by Dimaria is
17 shown in Figure 4a. Dielectric layer 44 is formed between
18 polysilicon control gate 46 and polysilicon floating gate
19 45. Dielectric layer 44 includes three layers 44a, 44b and
20 44c as shown in more detail in Figure 4b. Layers 44a and
21 44c are formed of silicon-rich silicon dioxide (i.e.
22 silicon dioxide including an abundance of excess silicon
23 atoms), and layer 44b is formed of substantially pure
24 silicon dioxide. The operation of the Dimaria EEPROM
25 shown in Figure 4 is similar to the prior art EEPROM shown
26 in Figure 1a with one significant difference: floating
27 gate 45 is charged and discharged through control gate 46,
28 and three layer structure 44 is used to inject tunnelling
29 electrons between control gate 46 and floating gate 45
30 through dielectric 44 to either charge or discharge floating
31 gate 45, as desired. When floating gate 45 is charged
32 positive by causing electrons to tunnel out of the floating
33 gate 45 through dielectric layer 44 into control gate 46,
34 the control gate threshold voltage of Dimaria's transistor
35 140 is decreased, thus storing a logical one. Conversely,
36 when floating gate 45 is discharged by causing electrons
37 to tunnel from control gate 46 through dielectric 44 into
38

1 floating gate 45, the control gate threshold voltage of
2 Dimaria's transistor 140 is increased, thus storing a
3 logical zero. As described by Dimaria, by forming a thin
4 SiO_2 layer between two layers of silicon-rich SiO_2 , the
5 current injection through the center SiO_2 layer is consider-
6 ably enhanced as compared with the current injection
7 through a single layer of SiO_2 having a thickness equal to
8 the center SiO_2 layer of the dielectric sandwich. Accord-
9 ingly, this three layer dielectric structure is sometimes
10 referred to as a "Dual Electron Injector Structure" (DEIS).

11

12 SUMMARY

13

14 In accordance with the teachings of this invention, a
15 unique EEPROM device and a unique EPROM device are provided
16 with a composite dielectric layer between the control gate
17 and the floating gate which is sufficiently thick to
18 provide electrical and physical integrity but also has a
19 high equivalent dielectric constant. The composite dielec-
20 tric layer is fabricated using methods which are compatible
21 with the methods used to fabricate integrated circuits in
22 a silicon substrate. The use of the composite dielectric
23 layer in accordance with the teachings of this invention
24 alleviates certain problems experienced in the prior art
25 EPROM and EEPROM devices which utilize a polycrystalline
26 silicon floating gate and a polycrystalline silicon control
27 gate separated by an SiO_2 dielectric layer, such as the
28 problems of sharp silicon points causing low dielectric
29 breakdown strength and the puncturing of the dielectric
30 layer by polysilicon grain growth. In accordance with the
31 teachings of this invention, a memory device includes
32 buffering layers (i.e. layers which buffers abnormally
33 high electric fields at sharp points and prevents poly-
34 silicon grain growth from punching through the thin
35 dielectric oxide) of silicon-rich SiO_2 between the poly-
36 silicon control gate and the silicon dioxide, and between
37 the polysilicon floating gate and the silicon dioxide.

38

1 In contrast to the prior art use of a composite
2 dielectric layer as an electron injection structure (equi-
3 valent to a tunnel oxide) between the floating gate and
4 the control gate of an EEPROM device, in accordance with
5 one embodiment of this invention, a composite dielectric
6 layer serves as a partially relaxable dielectric between
7 the control gate and the floating gate of an EEPROM or an
8 EPROM. The composite dielectric layer provides high
9 capacitance between the floating gate and the control gate
10 without the insulative and breakdown problems encountered
11 with prior art thin dielectric layers, with electron
12 injection taking place through the gate oxide between the
13 drain extension and the floating gate, (EEPROM), and
14 between the channel and the floating gate (EPROM).
15

16 In another embodiment of this invention, the composite
17 dielectric layer is implemented between the drain extension
18 (EEPROM) or the channel (EPROM) and the floating gate and
19 serves as the tunnel oxide, thereby providing increased
20 tunnelling efficiency as compared to prior art structures
21 which utilize a single layer of tunnelling oxide. The
22 invention will be further understood with reference to the
23 detailed description taken together with the drawings.
24

25 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

26

27 Figure 1a is a cross-sectional view of a typical
28 prior art EEPROM;
29

30 Figure 1b is a cross-sectional view of a typical
31 prior art EPROM;
32

33 Figure 2 depicts the mechanism of charge leakage and
34 formation of local high electric fields due to asperities
35 along polysilicon/SiO₂ interfaces;
36
37
38

1 Figure 3 depicts the growth of silicon grains in a
2 SiO₂ region formed adjacent to a polysilicon layer;

3
4 Figure 4a is a cross-sectional view of a prior art
5 EEPROM incorporating a Dual Electron Injector Structure
6 (DEIS);

7
8 Figure 4b is a detailed cross-sectional view of the
9 DEIS structure of Figure 4a;

10
11 Figure 5a is a cross-sectional view of two electrical
12 conductors separated by a partially relaxable composite
13 dielectric structure;

14
15 Figure 5b depicts the charge transfer which occurs
16 when a voltage is applied to the structure of Figure 5a;

17
18 Figures 5c-5e are graphical representations of the
19 qualitative behavior of the structure of Figure 5a;

20
21 Figure 6 is a cross-sectional view of an EEPROM
22 constructed in accordance with one embodiment of this
23 invention utilizing a composite dielectric layer between
24 the control gate and the floating gate and a tunnel oxide
25 between the floating gate and the drain;

26
27 Figure 7 is a cross-sectional view of an EPROM con-
28 structed in accordance with another embodiment of this
29 invention;

30
31 Figures 8a and 8b are a plan view and a cross-sectional
32 view, respectively, of a two-transistor EEPROM cell con-
33 structed in accordance with one embodiment of this invention;
34 and

35
36 Figures 9-17 are cross-sectional views depicting one
37 process for fabricating the structure of Figures 8a and
38 8b.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Figure 6 shows one embodiment of an EEPROM cell 78 constructed in accordance with this invention. EEPROM cell 78 is formed in P type silicon 79, and includes N type source 83, N type drain 84, field oxide 87, gate oxide 87a, floating gate 81, control gate 80, and partially relaxable composite dielectric 86. EEPROM cell 78 also includes tunnel oxide 85 located between N type drain region 84 and floating gate 81. Tunnel oxide 85 allows tunnelling of electrons between floating gate 81 and N type drain region 84 in order to program and erase cell 78, as previously described in conjunction with prior art EEPROMs.

Composite dielectric layer 86 formed between control gate 80 and floating gate 81 is shown in more detail in Figure 5a. Composite dielectric layer 86 is formed of silicon-rich SiO_2 layer 86a, SiO_2 layer 86b and silicon-rich SiO_2 layer 86c. The top and bottom layers 86a and 86c of partially relaxable dielectric 86 are so-called "silicon-rich" SiO_2 layers, meaning that layers 86a and 86c have an abundance of free silicon atoms. Although silicon-rich SiO_2 layers 86a and 86c are not used for electron injection, as taught by DiMaria, when SiO_2 layers 86a and 86c are used as a partially relaxable dielectric in accordance with this invention, silicon-rich SiO_2 layers 86a and 86c are preferably formed with a free silicon content in the range of 40 to 65 atomic percent, similar to the free silicon content used by DeMaria, et al. The thickness of the silicon-rich SiO_2 layers 86a and 86b is preferably between approximately 150Å to 500Å, because thicker layers have longer relaxation times (more fully described later) and thinner layers reduce the physical integrity of the composite dielectric layer 86, thus increasing the possibility of a short circuit between control gate 80 and floating gate 81 through composite

1 dielectric layer 86. The center layer 86b of composite
2 dielectric layer 86 is a layer of silicon dioxide, prefer-
3 ably having a thickness within the range of approximately
4 100Å to 300Å. Thicker intermediate layers 86b of SiO_2
5 provide decreased capacitance between control gate 80 and
6 floating gate 81 and thinner layers provide a low dielec-
7 tric breakdown strength of composite dielectric layer 86.

8
9 Layers 86a and 86c of silicon-rich SiO_2 are referred
10 to as "relaxable" in that, when an electric field is
11 applied between the control gate 81 and floating gate 82,
12 layers 86a and 86c have sufficient conductivity to allow
13 charges from control gate 81 and floating gate 81 to be
14 transported to the upper and lower surfaces, respectively,
15 of layer 86c and 86a in a short period of time (the
16 "relaxation time"), as shown in Figure 5b, after which any
17 further increase in the magnitude of the electric field
18 will further increase the charge across the dielectric
19 layer 86b, and relaxable dielectric layers 86a and 86c
20 behave electrically as part of control gate 80 and floating
21 gate 81, respectively. Dimaria teaches that a similar
22 sandwich structure is utilized to inject electrons into
23 the floating gate, not as a partially relaxable dielectric
24 to increase capacitive coupling. In contrast to the
25 structure of Dimaria, electrons do not tunnel from control
26 gate 80 to floating gate 81 through dielectric 86 of the
27 present invention because in this invention only a small
28 fraction of the high applied voltage appears across the
29 coupling dielectric 86. This is because the "coupling
30 ratio" (described in more detail later) of the structure
31 78 is very different from Dimaria's cell 140.

32
33 The relaxation time T is defined as the time required
34 after the initial application of a voltage V_0 across
35 control gate 80 and floating gate 81 until relaxable
36 dielectric layers 86a and 86c behave electrically as part
37 of the control gate 80 and floating gate 81, respectively.
38

1 Relaxable dielectric layers 86a and 86c are considered to
2 behave electrically as part of control gate 80 and floating
3 gate 81, respectively, when the voltage across dielectric
4 layer 86b is equal to approximately 95% of the voltage
5 between control gate 80 and floating gate 81. The relaxation
6 time T is inversely proportional to the conductivity of
7 relaxable dielectric layers 86a and 86c. Also, the conduc-
8 tivity of the layers 86a and 86c increases exponentially
9 with the electric field across layers 86a and 86c, respec-
10 tively. Preferably the relaxation time T is made very
11 short by choosing suitable conductivities of relaxable
12 dielectric layers 86a and 86c as determined by the propor-
13 tion of free silicon atoms within the relaxable dielectric
14 layers 86a, 86c. For example, for a relaxation time T on
15 the order of 10 to 100 microseconds, the required conduc-
16 tivities of relaxable dielectric layers 86a and 86c is met
17 by having a free silicon content of layers 86a and 86c of
18 approximately 40-65%. When relaxation of layers 86a and
19 86c has occurred, there is a small sustaining electric
20 field in layers 86a and 86c which support the space charges
21 within the layers 86a and 86c. This sustaining electric
22 field is very small (i.e. much less than 10^6 volts/cm if
23 layers 86a and 86c have a sufficiently high conductivity,
24 corresponding to a free silicon content of layers 86a and
25 86c of approximately 50 atomic percent).

26
27 Figures 5c, 5d and 5e depict in graphical form the
28 qualitative behavior of the partially relaxable composite
29 dielectric layer 86 of Figure 5a. After the application
30 of an electric field to dielectric 86 and before relaxation
31 time T has elapsed, layers 86a and 86c are not yet fully
32 relaxed and behave electrically as part of the total
33 dielectric composite layer 86, rather than as part of
34 control gate 80 and floating gate 81, respectively. After
35 relaxation time T has lapsed, layers 86a and 86c are fully
36 relaxed and behave electrically as part of control gate 80
37 and floating gate 81, respectively, and the dielectric
38

1 breakdown voltage of the composite dielectric layer 86 is
2 equal to the breakdown voltage of dielectric layer 86b.
3 Figure 5c shows the voltage V_0 applied across the composite
4 dielectric layer 86b of Figure 5a. Figure 5d shows the
5 change in voltage across the center dielectric layer 86b
6 with respect to time and Figure 5e shows the change in
7 capacitance between control gate 80 and floating gate 81
8 as a function of time after the application at time $t=0$ of
9 a voltage V_0 between control gate 80 and floating gate 81.
10 If the relaxation time T and the sustaining voltage V_{sus}
11 (the voltage required to maintain the space charge across
12 layers 86a and 86c) are both small (i.e. $T \ll 10$ milliseconds,
13 $V_{sus} \ll 10$ volts), the composite dielectric structure 86 is
14 capacitively equivalent (when $t > T$) to the use of a single
15 layer 86b, even though the total thickness is that of all
16 three layers 86a, 86b and 86c.

17
18 In typical prior art EEPROM devices, the write and
19 erase operations are performed by applying an approximately
20 20 volt pulse of approximately 10 millisecond duration to
21 control gate 16 of EEPROM 19 of Figure 1a. In accordance
22 with this invention, the write and erase operations are
23 performed with the composite dielectric layer 86 of Figures
24 5a and 6 used in place of the 600-700Å layer 18 of SiO_2
25 (Figure 1) used in prior art EEPROMS. Since excellent
26 physical and electrical integrity is achieved with the
27 composite dielectric structure of Fig. 5a, the center SiO_2
28 layer 86b can be as thin as only 100Å without losing
29 dielectric integrity. Capacitive coupling between control
30 gate 80 and floating gate 81 of an EEPROM constructed in
31 accordance with the principles of this invention is enhanced
32 by 6 to 7 times as compared to prior art EEPROM structures
33 which utilize a 600-700Å layer of SiO_2 as the dielectric
34 between the control gate and the floating gate.

35
36 The silicon-rich SiO_2 layer is a two-phase mixture of
37 silicon and SiO_2 , in that very small silicon particles are
38

1 dispersed throughout the silicon-rich SiO_2 layer. This
2 silicon-rich SiO_2 layer is very stable at the high temper-
3 atures (typically approximately 1100°C) often encountered
4 in semiconductor processing. Furthermore, the silicon
5 particles or "grains" formed within the silicon-rich SiO_2
6 layer rapidly reach a saturated size (do not grow further)
7 of about 100\AA because of a limited amount of excess silicon
8 in the oxide, thus limiting silicon grain size to approximate
9 100\AA . This is in stark contrast to prior art memory
10 structures where large silicon grains may penetrate into
11 the SiO_2 layer formed adjacent to polysilicon layers.
12 There is no conglomeration of silicon grains upon further
13 processing of the semiconductor device because silicon
14 atoms have very small diffusivities in oxide, thus prevent-
15 ing the formation of larger silicon grains within the
16 silicon-rich SiO_2 layers 86a and 86c or the SiO_2 layer 86b
17 (Figure 5a). Because of the chemical stability of the
18 composite dielectric layer 86, a considerable yield improve-
19 ment is achieved as compared with the yield of prior art
20 devices utilizing only a single SiO_2 dielectric layer
21 between the polysilicon control gate 16 and floating gate
22 15 (Figure 1).
23

24 In accordance with the present invention, the capaci-
25 tance C_1 between control gate 80 and floating gate 81
26 (Figure 6) is enhanced by as much as 6 to 7 times over
27 prior art structures using a single SiO_2 dielectric layer
28 between the control gate and the floating gate. If the
29 capacitance between the floating gate 81 and the drain 84
30 is C_2 , then the coupling ratio η of control gate 80 to
31 floating gate 81, is defined (neglecting parasitic capaci-
32 tances) as:
33

34
$$\eta = C_1 / (C_1 + C_2)$$

35
36 where η = control gate 80 to floating gate 81
37 coupling ratio;
38

5

23

38

1 The silicon-rich $\text{SiO}_2/\text{SiO}_2/\text{silicon-rich SiO}_2$ structure
2 is only one composite dielectric which is suitable for use
3 in accordance with the teachings of this invention. Other
4 embodiments of this invention utilize silicon-rich Si_3N_4
5 as a relaxable dielectric. Such embodiments of this
6 invention form a composite dielectric layer of silicon-rich
7 $\text{Si}_3\text{N}_4/\text{SiO}_2/\text{silicon-rich Si}_3\text{N}_4$ or silicon-rich $\text{Si}_3\text{N}_4/\text{Si}_3\text{N}_4/\text{silicon-rich Si}_3\text{N}_4$.
8 Methods for fabricating such composite
9 dielectric structures are obvious to one of ordinary skill
10 in the art in light of the teachings of this specification.
11 For example, CVD processes utilizing SiH_4 and N_2 gases
12 can be used for Si_3N_4 and Si-rich Si_3N_4 .
13

14 Tunnel oxide 85 in one embodiment of the EEPROM of
15 Figure 6 is thermal oxide of approximately 100Å in thickness.
16 In another embodiment, tunnel oxide 85 is a silicon-rich
17 $\text{SiO}_2/\text{SiO}_2/\text{silicon-rich SiO}_2$ composite dielectric layer
18 similar to the composite dielectric 86, thus providing
19 enhanced current injection between drain 84 and floating
20 gate 81 as compared to prior art EEPROMs utilizing a
21 single SiO_2 layer as tunnel oxide 85, thereby allowing the
22 use of a lower write/erase voltage for programming the
23 cell 78. In this embodiment of my invention, two separate
24 partially relaxable dielectric layers serve two purposes:
25 enhancement of the capacitance between the control gate 80
26 and floating gate 81, and enhancement of the tunnel current
27 between floating gate 81 and drain 84 during programming
28 and erasure of cell 78. In contrast to DiMaria, electron
29 tunnelling between control gate 80 and floating gate 81 is
30 avoided by the fact that the majority of the write/erase
31 voltage (e.g. 70%) appears across the tunnel oxide 85, and
32 only a small fraction (e.g. 30%) of the voltage appears
33 across the partially relaxable composite dielectric 86.
34

35 One embodiment of an EPROM constructed in accordance
36 with the teachings of the present invention is shown in
37 the cross-sectional view of Figure 7. In an EPROM con-
38

1 structured in accordance with the principles of this invention,
2 partially relaxable dielectric layer 96 formed between
3 polysilicon control gate 90 and polysilicon floating gate
4 91 greatly enhances capacitive coupling between control
5 gate 90 and floating gate 91, and therefore a lower pro-
6 gramming voltage on the control gate 90 can be used, as
7 compared with prior art EPROM devices. Since an EPROM
8 constructed in accordance with this invention can achieve
9 a given capacitance value C_1 between floating gate 91 and
10 control gate 90 with much less floating gate area as
11 compared to prior art EPROM cells, a smaller EPROM cell is
12 achieved for a given programming voltage, thereby allowing
13 the formation of more dense arrays of memory cells.

14
15 Figures 8a and 8b show one embodiment of a two-
16 transistor EEPROM cell 200 constructed in accordance with
17 the teachings of this invention. Figure 8a is a top view
18 of cell 200 and Figure 8b is a cross-sectional view drawn
19 along the line AA of Figure 8a. P type substrate 307, N
20 type source region 106, N type drain 104, word line 103,
21 electrical contact 107, and transistor channel 110 form a
22 MOSFET 201 used as a "select" transistor 201. The select
23 transistor 201 is used to provide the selective writing,
24 erasing and reading of cell 200, in a manner which is well
25 known in the prior art. The left sides of Figures 8a and
26 8b show the memory MOSFET 202, having a floating gate 101
27 capable of storing a charge representing the data stored
28 in cell 200. Partially relaxable dielectric 102, comprising
29 a sandwich of silicon-rich $\text{SiO}_2/\text{SiO}_2/\text{silicon-rich SiO}_2$, is
30 incorporated between floating gate 101 and control gate
31 100.

32
33 To program the cell 200 to a logical one, high voltages
34 (typically 15 volts) are selectively applied to both word
35 line 103 and metal bit line 109 which makes contact with
36 drain 104 of the select transistor 201. The high voltage
37 on drain 104 is transferred through channel 110 to N type
38

1 region 106. Control gate 100 is connected to ground.
2 Partially relaxable composite dielectric 102 provides high
3 capacitive coupling between the polysilicon control gate
4 100 and polysilicon floating gate 101. Therefore, floating
5 gate 101 is capacitively coupled to ground. Tunnel oxide
6 105 between N type region 106 (high voltage) and floating
7 gate 101 (near ground) allow electrons to tunnel out of
8 floating gate 101 through tunneling dielectric 105 into N
9 type region 106, thereby programming the memory transistor
10 202 with a positive charge on floating gate 101. After
11 programming of memory transistor 202, the positive charge
12 is retained on floating gate 101 (unless erased) for an
13 extremely long period of time, typically ten years. The
14 positive charge stored on floating gate 101 decreases the
15 control gate threshold voltage of memory transistor 202.
16 This decreased threshold voltage denotes a logical zero.
17

18 To erase the memory transistor 202, drain 104 is
19 connected to ground, and a high voltage is applied to word
20 line 103 and control gate 100; floating gate 101 is capaci-
21 tively coupled to the high voltage on control gate 100.
22 The low drain 104 voltage is applied through channel 110
23 to N type region 106 and erasing occurs as electrons are
24 injected from N type region 106, through tunnel dielectric
25 105, into floating gate 101. Thus, floating gate 101
26 becomes negatively charged, raising the control gate
27 threshold voltage of memory transistor 202. This high
28 threshold voltage denotes a logical one.
29

30 One process for fabricating devices in accordance
31 with this invention will be described with reference to
32 Figures 9-17. Silicon substrate 109 is covered by a base
33 layer of silicon dioxide 120 having a thickness of 400-1000
34 angstroms. Hereinafter, the entire structure at various
35 stages in the fabrication process will be referred to as a
36 "wafer". Base oxide 120 is formed, for example, by oxidiz-
37 ing the wafer in a wet oxygen atmosphere at approximately
38

1 920°C for approximately 15-30 minutes. A layer of nitride
2 (not shown) is then deposited on top of the base oxide 120
3 to a thickness of 400-1500Å, for example, by conventional
4 chemical vapor deposition. Well known photolithographic
5 and etching techniques are then used to pattern the
6 nitride layer to define areas in which active devices are
7 to be formed. Channel stops 122 are then formed, for
8 example by the ion implantation of boron at approximately
9 80 KEV to a dosage of approximately 10^{13} atoms/cm². Field
10 oxide 121 is grown to a thickness of approximately 1
11 micron, for example, by oxidation in wet oxygen at approxi-
12 mately 900°C for approximately 20 hours. The remaining
13 portions of the masking nitride is then removed, for
14 example by etching with phosphoric acid, providing the
15 structure shown in Figure 9.

16
17 Referring to Figure 10 (field oxide 121 is not shown
18 in Figs. 10-17 for simplicity), a photoresist pattern 125
19 is used in a well known manner to define transistor channels
20 110 and 111, and the exposed portions of base oxide 120
21 are removed, for example by etching with buffered HF. The
22 exposed surface of the wafer is then doped to form heavily
23 doped N regions 104, 106 and 108, for example by ion
24 implantation of arsenic at approximately 100 KEV to a
25 dosage of approximately 10^{16} atoms/cm².

26
27 Referring to Figure 11, photoresist 125 is removed,
28 followed by the sequential formation of three layers:
29 150Å silicon-rich SiO₂ layer 128, 100Å SiO₂ layer 129, and
30 150Å silicon-rich SiO₂ layer 130, thereby forming composite
31 dielectric layer 140. The atomic percent of silicon in
32 silicon-rich SiO₂ layers 128 and 130 is typically in the
33 range of 40% to 65%. In one embodiment, the deposition
34 process utilizes chemical vapor deposition (CVD) methods.
35 By properly adjusting the ratio of the reacting gases,
36 SiH₄ and N₂O, at a deposition temperature of 700°C, all
37 three layers are deposited in one CVD run. For instance,
38

1 a $\text{SiF}_4/\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ratio within the range of 3:1 to 10:1 can be
2 used. Another method of forming the composite dielectric
3 layer 140 is Low Pressure CVD, which gives better uniformity
4 and higher throughput.
5

6 After deposition of composite dielectric layer 140, a
7 layer 133 (Figure 12) of approximately 1000Å undoped poly-
8 silicon is formed, for example by low pressure CVD. A
9 layer 134 of approximately 500Å silicon nitride (Si_3N_4) is
10 then formed, for example by low pressure CVD. Polysilicon
11 layer 133 is preferably deposited by the decomposition of
12 SiF_4 gas in the same CVD reactor as is used to form com-
13 posite dielectric layer 140. Polysilicon layer 133 serves
14 as a buffer layer between nitride layer 134 and underlying
15 silicon-rich SiO_2 layer 130. This buffer layer 133 protects
16 Si-rich SiO_2 layer 144 from contamination and chemical
17 attack during later etching of masking nitride layer 134.
18 Top nitride layer 134 is used to define tunnel dielectric
19 140 in a novel "self-aligned" fashion, as described below.
20 Transistor channel regions 110 and 111 are protected by
21 base oxide 120 from contamination from silicon-rich SiO_2
22 layer 128 which otherwise is in direct contact with the
23 surface of channels 110 and 111.
24

25 Referring to Figure 12, photoresist layer 135 is
26 formed and patterned in a well known manner to cover
27 nitride layer 134 and undoped polysilicon layer 133 where
28 tunnel dielectric 140 is to be formed. The exposed nitride
29 and polysilicon layers are then removed, for example, by
30 plasma etching using CF_4 and O_2 plasmas, respectively, at
31 25°C. Remaining portions of photoresist 135 are then
32 removed in a well known manner. The wafer is then thermally
33 oxidized in wet or dry oxygen, thereby causing that portion
34 of composite dielectric layer 140 which is exposed to be
35 converted to pure SiO_2 . The part of composite dielectric
36 layer 140 which is protected by nitride layer 134 and
37 polysilicon layer 133 is unaffected by this oxidation step
38

1 because silicon nitride is oxidation resistant. Converted
2 portions of composite dielectric layer 140 and the remaining
3 base oxide 120 are then removed, for example by etching
4 with a 10% HF solution at 23°C, leaving tunnel dielectric
5 140 under nitride layer 134 and polysilicon layer 133
6 (Figure 13).

7
8 Referring now to Figure 14, with the remaining portion
9 of nitride layer 134 protecting polysilicon layer 133 from
10 oxidation, gate oxide layer 145 is formed on exposed
11 portions of the surface of channels 110 and 111 to a
12 thickness of approximately 400Å, for example by oxidation
13 in wet O₂ at approximately 900°C for approximately 40
14 minutes. Gate oxide 145 is also grown simultaneously over
15 the heavily doped N regions 104, 106 and 108 and tends to
16 be thicker (i.e. approximately 1000Å) than the gate oxide
17 145 over the channel due to the increased oxidation rate
18 of regions 104, 106 and 108 due to the presence of dopants
19 therein. Nitride layer 134 is then removed, for example
20 by etching with hot phosphoric acid at approximately 160°C
21 for approximately 10 minutes. Gate oxide 145 and poly-
22 silicon 133 have very low etch rates in phosphoric acid
23 compared to nitride (i.e. approximately 20 Å/minute for
24 nitride versus less than 1 Å/minute for oxide and poly),
25 and thus are unaffected by the etching of nitride 134.

26
27 Of importance, the use of nitride layer 134 and
28 polysilicon 133 to define tunnel dielectric 140 has several
29 advantages. For instance, there is no overlap of gate
30 oxide 145 and tunnel dielectric 140; i.e., tunnel dielectric
31 140 is "self-aligned" to gate oxide 145. Overlap regions
32 not only waste cell area but also cause reliability problems
33 due to charge trapping effects. A further advantage is
34 that the silicon-rich SiO₂/SiO₂/silicon-rich SiO₂ composite
35 tunnel dielectric 140 (Figures 11-14), which is made of
36 ultra thin films (approximately 100-150Å thick) and is
37 extremely sensitive to contamination and physical or
38

1 chemical damage, is always protected during processing by
2 a polysilicon buffer layer 133 (Figures 11-14). Further-
3 more gate oxide layer 145 is formed independently of the
4 formation of composite dielectric layer 140 and polysilicon
5 layer 133, which provides gate oxide to layer 145 having
6 much better quality as compared to gate oxide layers
7 formed by other methods, for example, where undesired
8 portions of composite dielectric layer 140 is removed from
9 the top of gate oxide 120 (Figure 12) without using the
10 above mentioned technique.
11

12 Referring to Figure 15, polysilicon layer 150 is then
13 formed to a thickness of approximately 3000Å, for example
14 by CVD using SiE_4 gas at approximately 620°C. Poly layer
15 150 is then doped with, for example, phosphorus in a well
16 known manner to reduce its resistivity to approximately
17 1×10^{-3} ohm-cm. Partially relaxable composite dielectric
18 structure 102 is then formed on doped polysilicon layer
19 150. In one embodiment of this invention, composite
20 dielectric structure 102 is formed of three layers con-
21 sisting of 150Å silicon-rich SiO_2 , 100Å SiO_2 and 150Å
22 silicon-rich SiO , although other thicknesses and materials
23 can be used in accordance with the teachings of this
24 invention. The silicon-rich SiO_2 films are similar to
25 those used to form composite tunnel dielectric 140. In one
26 embodiment of this invention, more silicon atoms are
27 incorporated into the silicon-rich SiO_2 layers of composite
28 dielectric 102 (e.g. 60% silicon) than the silicon-rich
29 SiO_2 tunnelling dielectric 140 (e.g. 50% silicon), thus
30 minimizing the relaxation time of dielectric layer 102 by
31 increasing the conductivity of the silicon-rich SiO_2
32 layers within dielectric layer 102 due to their high
33 silicon content.
34

35 A 1000 Å undoped polysilicon layer 153 and a 500Å
36 layer of silicon nitride 152 are formed on top of dielectric
37 102 by, for example, LPCVD. A layer of photoresist (not
38

1 shown) is formed and patterned in a well known manner to
2 define floating gate 101. Unmasked portions of nitride
3 layer 152 are removed, for example by etching with hot
4 phosphoric acid. Unmasked portions of poly layer 153 and
5 oxide 102 are then removed, for example by etching with O_2
6 plasma and buffered HF, respectively. A second photoresist
7 layer 151 is then formed to define floating gate 101 and
8 control gate 103. Unmasked portions of poly layer 150 are
9 then removed, for example by plasma etching with O_2 gas.
10 Of importance, polysilicon layer 133 remaining on top of
11 tunnel dielectric 140 is doped by and becomes part of
12 polysilicon layer 150a, which in turn becomes floating
13 gate 101. Portion 150b of polysilicon layer 150 forms
14 word line 103.

15

16 Additional N type regions 156 are formed, for example
17 by the ion implantation of arsenic at approximately 100
18 KEV to a dosage of approximately 10^{16} atoms/cm², thereby
19 connecting the gap between N type region 106 and word line
20 103, and the gap between word line 103 and N type region
21 104. Photoresist 151 is then removed in a well known
22 manner.

23

24 Oxide 160 of (Figure 16) is then formed to a thickness
25 of approximately 2000Å by, for example, thermal oxidation
26 in wet oxygen at approximately 800°C, for approximately
27 100 minutes. Nitride 152 is oxidation resistant and is
28 not oxidized during the formation of sidewall oxide 160.
29 Nitride 152 is then removed, for example by etching with
30 hot phosphoric acid.

31

32 Polysilicon layer 175 (Figure 17) is then formed, for
33 example by LPCVD and doped, for example with phosphorus to
34 reduce its resistivity to approximately 1×10^{-3} ohm-cm.
35 Photoresist 170 is formed and patterned in a well known
36 manner to define the desired interconnect pattern of
37 polysilicon layer 175, as shown in Figure 17. Exposed

38

1 portions of polysilicon 175 are then removed, for example
2 by etching with CF_4 plasma at 25°C and resist 170 is then
3 removed in a well known manner. Oxidation of polysilicon
4 layer 175 passivates layer 175 and also oxidizes exposed
5 portions undoped polysilicon layer 153a. Unexposed poly-
6 silicon layer 153b is doped by dopant diffusion from
7 polysilicon layer 175 and, together with polysilicon layer
8 175, forms control gate 100 of the structure shown in
9 Figure 8b.

10
11 Typical processing steps are then employed, for
12 instance, doped glass deposition, contact doping, glass
13 reflow and metal interconnect deposition and patterning.
14 The completed structure is shown in Figure 8b. Either
15 polysilicon layer 100 or polysilicon layer 101 is used as
16 FET gates in periphery circuits, as desired. Conventional
17 steps utilized in the fabrication of integrated circuit
18 memory products, such as threshold adjustment implants,
19 buried contacts, etc. are not described for brevity but
20 are easily understood to those of ordinary skill in the
21 art.

22
23 While specific embodiments of this invention have been
24 presented in the specification, these specific embodiments
25 are intended to serve by way of example only and are not
26 to be construed as limitations on the scope of this inven-
27 tion. Numerous other embodiments of this invention will
28 become readily apparent to those with ordinary skill in
29 the art in light of the teachings of this specification.

1

CLAIMS

5

1. A Programmable Read Only Memory structure,
comprising a plurality of cells each including :

10

a semi conductor substrate;
a source (83, 93) formed within said substrate;
a drain (84,94) formed within said substrate;
a channel region formed within said substrate
between said source and said drain;

15

a floating gate (81, 91) located above said
channel and spaced apart from said channel by a gate
dielectric (87a, 97); and

20

a control gate (80, 90) located above and
separated from said floating gate (81, 91) by a dielectric
(86, 96);

characterized in that at least one of said dielectrics
is a partially relaxable dielectric wherein the charge
stored on said floating gate is altered by the transfer of
charge from said floating gate through said dielectric.

25

2. The structure as in Claim 1, characterized in
that said partially relaxable dielectric comprises:

a first layer (86a) of a silicon-rich oxide of
silicon;

a second layer (86c) of a silicon-rich oxide
of silicon; and

30

a third layer (86b) of an oxide of silicon
located between said first and said second layers.

35

3. The structure as in Claim 2, characterized in
that said first and said second layers (86a, 86c) comprise
approximately 40 to 65 % atomic percent silicon.

1 4. The structure as in Claim 2 or 3, characterized
in that said first and said second layers (86a, 86c) each
have thickness within the range of approximately 150Å to
500Å.

5 5. The structure as in any one of Claims 2 to 4,
characterized in that said third layer (86b) has a thickness
within the range of approximately 100Å to 300Å.

10 6. The structure as in Claim 1, characterized in
that said partially relaxable dielectric comprises:

 a first layer (86a) of silicon-rich silicon
nitride;

 a second layer (86c) of silicon-rich silicon
15 nitride; and

 a third layer (86b) of an oxide of silicon
located between said first and said second layers.

20 7. The structure as in Claim 1, characterized in
that said partially relaxable dielectric comprises:

 a first layer (86a) of silicon-rich silicon
nitride;

 a second layer (86c) of silicon-rich silicon
nitride; and

25 a third layer (86b) of silicon nitride located
between said first and said second layers.

30 8. The structure as in any one of Claims 2 to 7,
characterized in that said partially relaxable dielectric
has a relaxation time within the range of approximately 10
to 100 microseconds, where said relaxation time is defined
as the time required between the application of a voltage
across said first and second layers and the time when
35 approximately 95 % of said voltage appears across said third
layer.

1 9. The structure as in any one of Claims 1 to 8,
characterized in that said gate dielectric includes a tunnel
portion (85) having a thickness less than the thickness of
the remainder of said gate dielectric, said tunnel portion
5 (85) and said gate dielectric (86) comprising said partially
relaxable dielectric.

10 10. The structure of any one of Claims 1 to 8,
characterized in that said charge on said floating gate (91)
10 is removed by exposing said floating gate to ultraviolet
light.

15

20

25

30

35

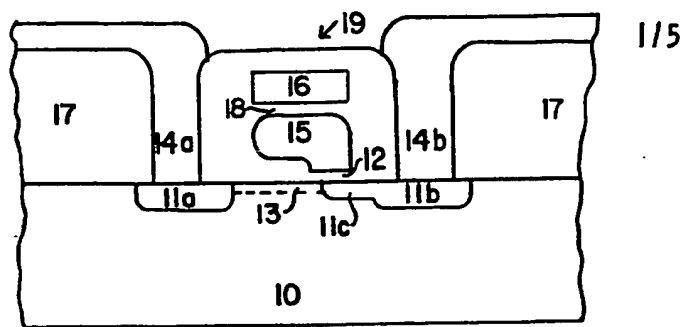


FIG. 1a

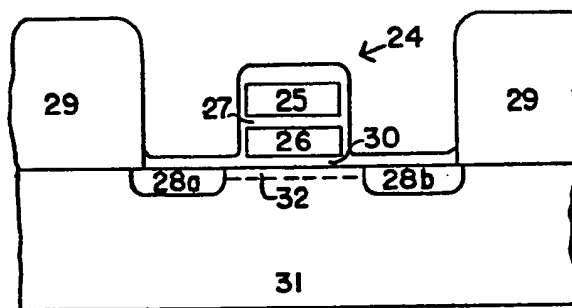


FIG. 1b

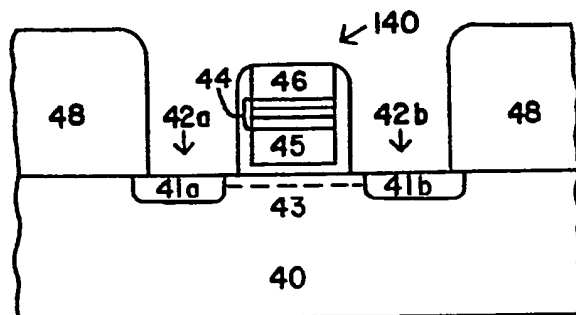


FIG. 4a

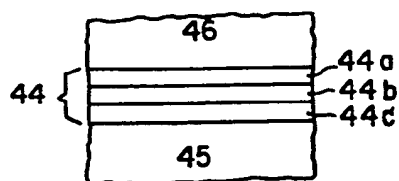


FIG. 4b

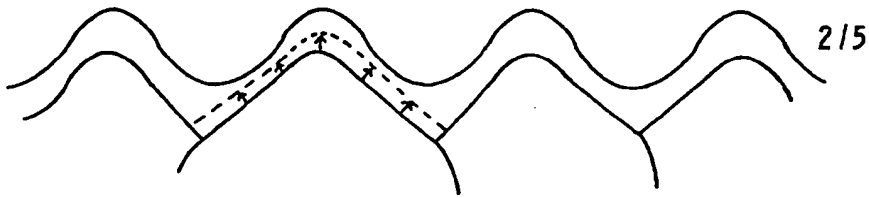


FIG. 3

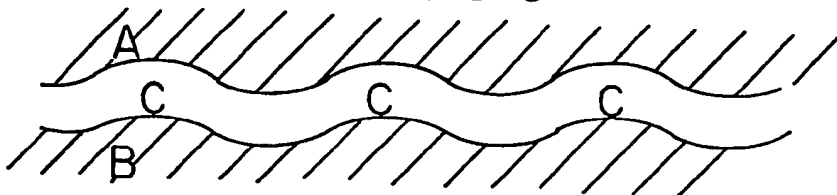


FIG. 2

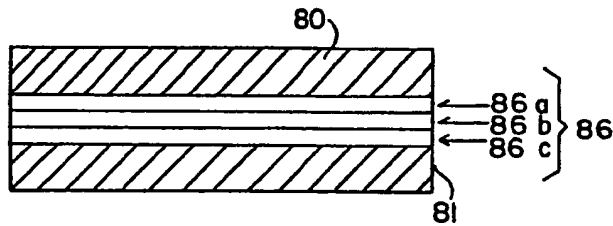


FIG. 5a

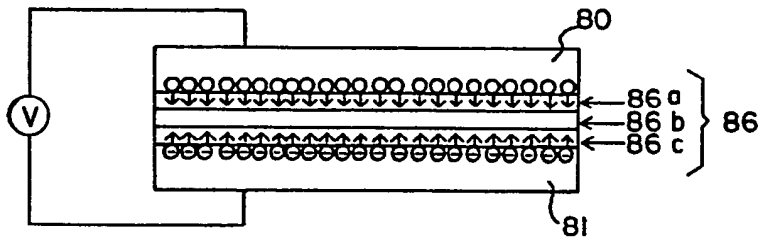


FIG. 5b

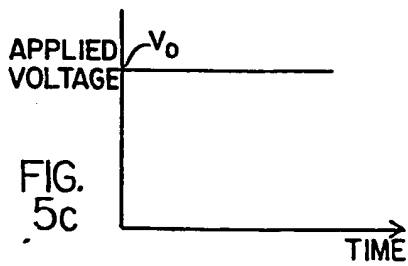


FIG. 5c

CAPACITANCE
BETWEEN
ELECTRODES
80 and 81

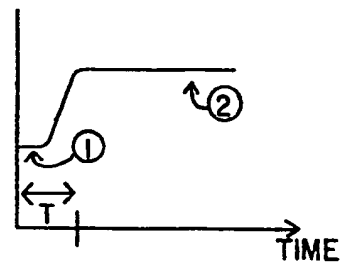
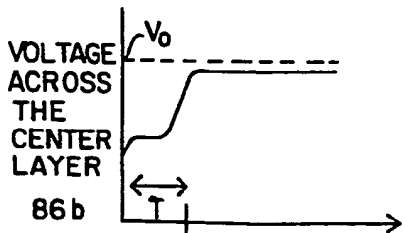


FIG. 5e



86 b

FIG. 5d

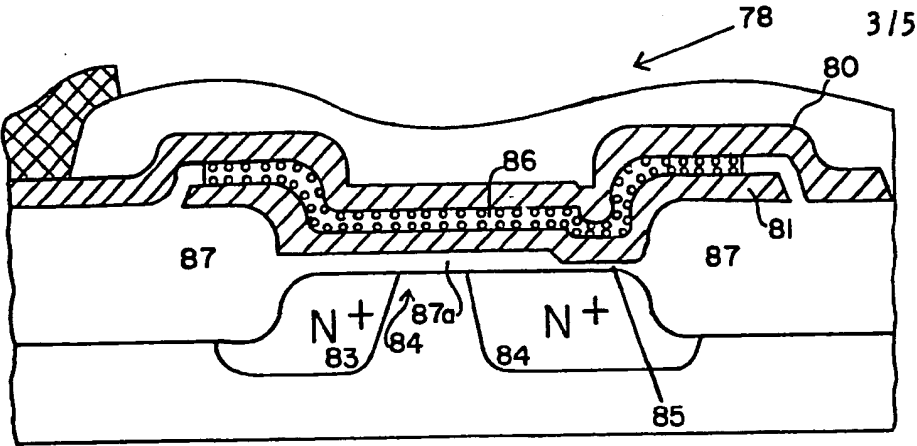


FIG. 6

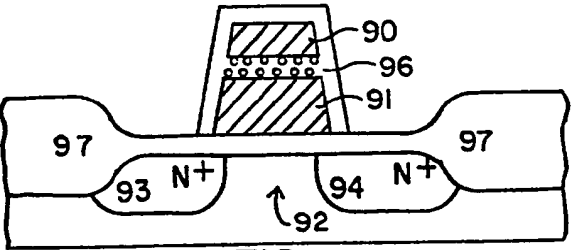


FIG. 7

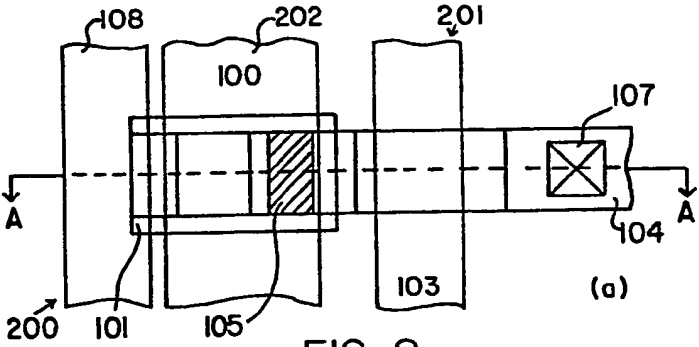


FIG. 8a

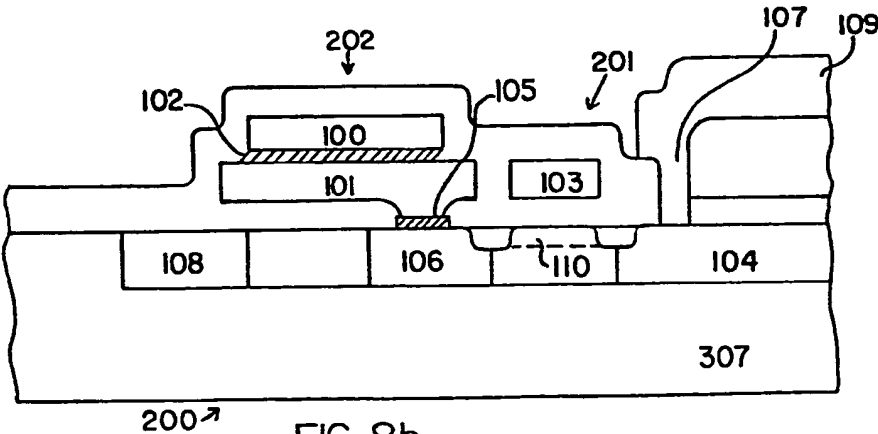


FIG. 8b

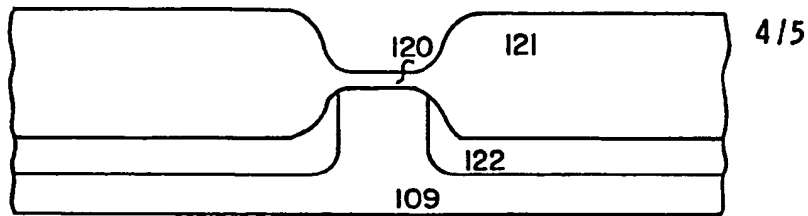


FIG. 9

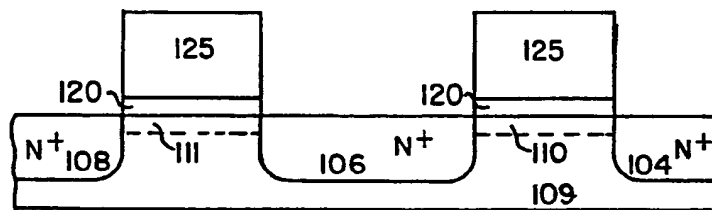


FIG. 10

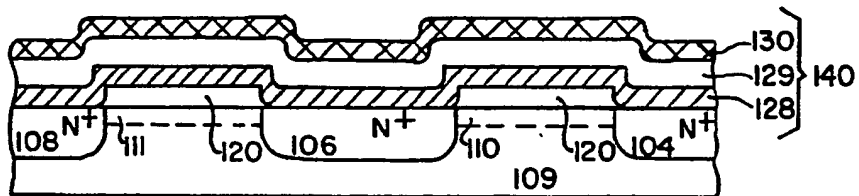


FIG. 11

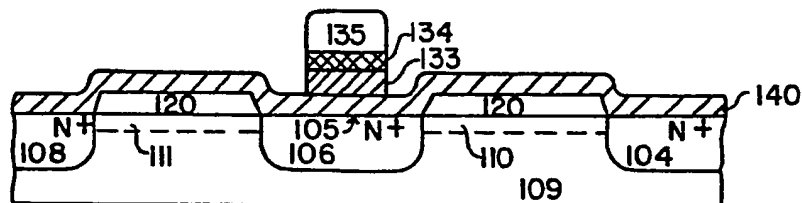


FIG. 12

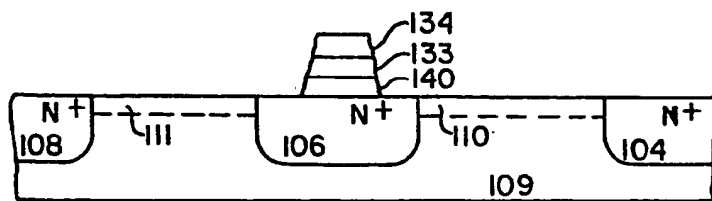


FIG. 13

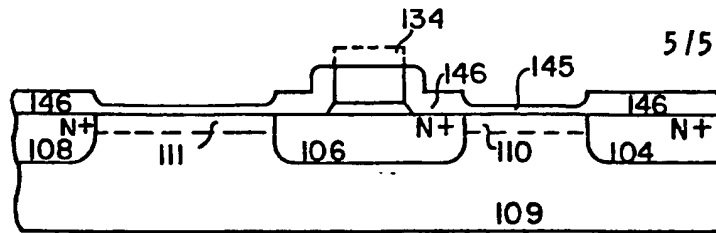


FIG. 14

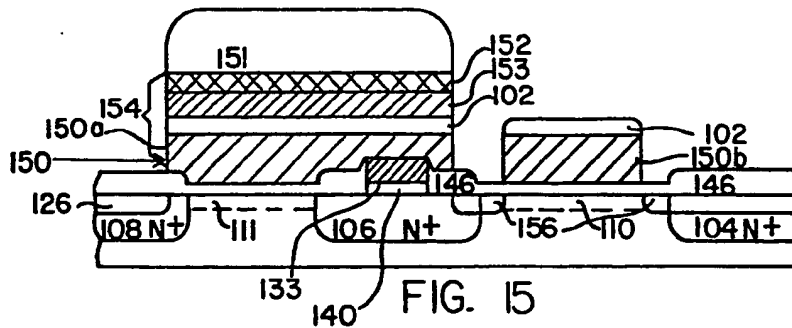


FIG. 15

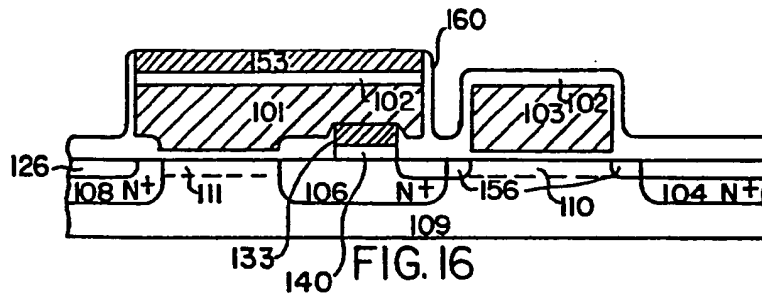


FIG. 16

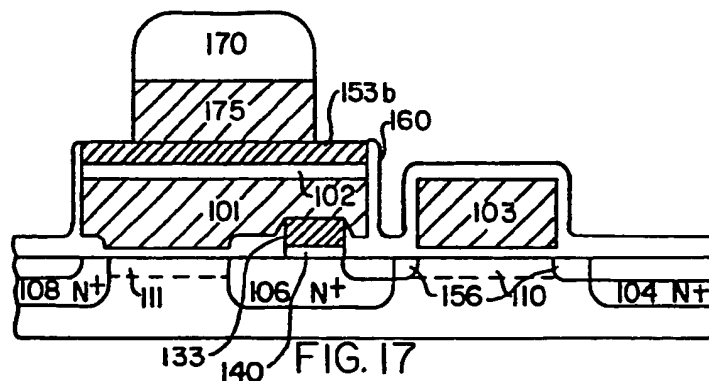


FIG. 17

17 **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

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54 **Programmable read only memory.**

57 Unique EPROM and EEPROM devices are provided with a composite dielectric layer between the control gate and the floating gate which is sufficiently thick to provide electrical and physical integrity but also has a high equivalent dielectric constant. The use of the composite dielectric layer alleviates certain problems experienced in the prior art EPROM and EEPROM devices which utilize a polycrystalline silicon floating gate and a polycrystalline silicon control gate separated by an SiO₂ dielectric layer, such as the problems of sharp silicon points polysilicon grain growth causing low dielectric breakdown strength. In contrast to the prior art, a composite dielectric layer serves as a partially relaxable dielectric between the control gate and the floating gate of an EEPROM or an EPROM. The composite dielectric layer provides high capacitance between the floating gate and the control gate without the insulative and breakdown problems encountered with prior art thin dielectric layers, with electron injection taking place through the gate oxide between the drain extension and the floating gate, (EEPROM), and between the channel and the floating gate (EPROM). In another embodiment of this invention, the composite dielectric layer is implemented between the drain extension (EEPROM) or the channel (EPROM) and the floating gate and serves as the tunnel oxide.

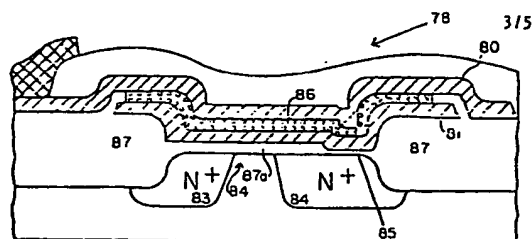


FIG. 6



European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

0105802
Application number

EP 83 40 1908

| DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Category | Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages | Relevant to claim | CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl. 3) |
| X | US-A-4 336 603 (IBM CORP.) * Figure 6; column 3, lines 48-55; column 7, lines 34-68; column 8, lines 1-21 * | 1-3 | H 01 L 29/60 G 11 C 29/00 |
| X | --- EP-A-0 034 653 (IBM CORP.) * Figure 1; page 6, lines 1-25; page 13, lines 16-31 * | 1-4, 6, 7 | |
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| Place of search THE HAGUE | | Date of completion of the search 14-11-1983 | Examiner ALLEN E.F. |
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